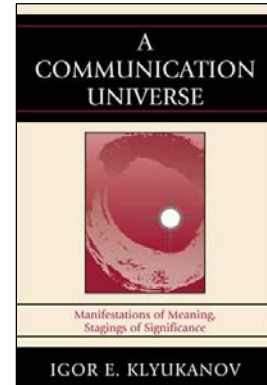


Igor E. Klyukanov, **A Communication Universe: Manifestations of Meaning, Stagings of Significance**, 2010, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 240 pp., \$75.00 (hardcover); \$24.95 (paperback).

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A novel approach to the process of communication taken by Igor Klyukanov in his groundbreaking study “A Communication Universe: Manifestations of Meaning, Stagings of Significance” is visible as soon as one opens the book and glances at the Contents. Part One, subtitled rather paradoxically as “The Future Behind Us,” immediately points out the crisis of identity associated with the concept of communication and the processes of its unfolding. The major perspective Klyukanov explores in his book is naturalistic and evolutionary—in contrast to the multiplicity of revolutionary “turns” as man-made “stages” pertaining to the history of communication. Klyukanov emphasizes the limitations of human subjects “acting on the world” (p. 10) and presents us humans as acting only in, or with, the world, and therefore as being an intrinsic part of, and ourselves subject to, the evolutionary processes of communication. Klyukanov is inspired by Yuri Lotman, a leading cultural theorist and semiotician of the famous Moscow-Tartu school who believed in the special significance of *evolutionary* consciousness that considers communication as an unfolding process, one which can gradually reveal the nature of objects to human subjects-in-kinship.



The first step for Klyukanov is to address a history of communication in the West that, as he notices, can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. The author insightfully remarks that theoretical contemplation as the pinnacle of knowledge in ancient Greece required one, ultimately, not to change the enviroing world, but to change oneself by means of “making one’s communicative experience meaningful” (p. 12). Klyukanov singles out communications studies in Russia as centered on the notions of language, thought, and culture, and as covering both cultural and philosophical aspects, not unlike the American socio-psychological tradition (p. 14).

One of the features of Klyukanov’s volume is multiple cross-linguistic references that help him to elucidate the alternative meanings of communication within the scope of his study. For example, the word “communication” per se can be translated in Russian as “obchenie”—or mutual interaction grounded in *shared* values—or “kommunikatsiya,” a simple mechanical transfer of information and the prevalent way in which communication has been habitually perceived. Klyukanov is adamant that, so far, communication studies have emphasized the latter as the only scientific mode—in lieu of another, humanistic one, grounded in *internally* held thoughts and emotions. This leads the author to address and spell out the deep ontological assumptions underlying communication theory, so as to formulate its very nature expressed in the thesis of *continuity*; that is, “go[ing] back in space and time in order to move forward”

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(p. 22). Klyukanov acknowledges that “contexts” is the most common theoretical way to approach communication, while complemented by new contemporary *metaphorical* views, 27 in all.

The two explanatory paradigms above are informed, in general, by the empirical-inductive methodology derived by the observational method of natural sciences and a speculative-deductive method characteristic of the approaches used in the humanities. The split between these two paradigms appears to be unbridgeable. Klyukanov's study is innovative in that he wants to highlight the “moral underpinnings” (p. 31) of communication while adopting a cosmic, non-reductive perspective that describes communication as a “moving experience” (p. 34) which necessarily becomes meaningful to those involved in it. Once again, linguistic analysis helps the author to drive home the nuances. He notices that the root “per” in the word “experience” has multiple connotations related (according to Morris) to danger, trial, or fear; Klyukanov thereby posits communication as an experiential process of trial and error, or as it seems to this reviewer as a philosopher of education, a *learning* process by virtue of its *participative* nature, one that importantly combines both discursive and non-discursive expressive means.

An elusive concept of the *measure* for communication understood as meaningful experience appears to haunt the author; but he finds the way out by adopting his *dynamic* approach. *Motion* was seen by Aristotle as the key to understanding the universe; analogously, Klyukanov's “communication universe” is described first and foremost in spatiotemporal terms as what Floyd Merrell called a self-organizing whole (p. 38). Klyukanov asserts that it is in the very gap between space and time where meaning emerges. Referring to the seemingly unsolvable problem of spatializing time, he remarks that the word “hour” is derived from the Latin and Greek *hora* (which itself originated from the Egyptian *hor*, for the sun's path named after “the god of the dawn” Horus) that means not just a duration of time but also a momentary stroke; therefore “experience becomes meaningful when time is literally cut into space” (p. 41): time strikes, thus allowing one to “capture” the meaning of experience in the paradoxical stop-over of the eternal dynamics and mutual transformation of the experiential signs comprising a process called *semiosis* by American philosopher Charles S. Peirce.

A reference to the process of semiosis (that, in the opinion of this reviewer, would have been beneficial for the overall conceptual framework presented in the book) is omitted by the author, however Klyukanov does refer to the semiotic square (a concept introduced by semiotician A. Greimas) and accordingly theorizes communication as a continuously rotating four-fold process in 90-degree transformations that together form a complete 360-degree circle, a unified whole. Drawing from Morris again, the author explicates the meaning of the word “Universe” as derived from *universus*, which means “whole,” “entire,” or “turned into one” (p. 42). This somewhat mystical, bordering on Neo-Platonic, “oneness” of communication is what makes it meaningful.

Sure enough, Klyukanov underlines the significance of the four (Neo-Platonic) elements of nature, namely air, water, earth, and fire as present in the very staging(s) of communication. He assigns specific qualities to each of these dynamic stagings. Part Two of the book is divided into four chapters that are subtitled, quite provocatively, *Up in the Air: Communication as Invocation*; *Down the Stream: Communication as Conversation*; *Of This Earth: Communication as Construction*; and *Through the Fire: Communication as Resignation*. The elemental metaphors are necessary to pinpoint the subtleties that

manifest as communication between the generic Self and the generic Other unfolds. As invocation, communication stays at the level of signaling, rather than signifying, as the Other is not fully present to the Self as yet; and the Self, being still *in potentia*, cannot be fully aware of the act of communication either. Signaling is non-discursive and appears to “belong” to the mystical *nous*, rather than to the developed consciousness, which features full-fledged intentionality. Rather, subjects experience “a gust of air” (p. 51) as an impulsive and unconscious feeling that allows them to subjugate objects, and by virtue of summoning them, to also “bring (one)Self into existence” (p. 53).

Klyukanov emphasizes that, while still up in the air, communication is but a faint call (p. 64) inherently grounded in uncertainty, in contrast with a direct-transportation model in which messages are transmitted in a linear manner from a sender to a receiver. In the author’s transformative (even if only ideal) model, an attempt to communicate is a challenge met by yet another staging grounded in “more interactive symbolic actions” (p. 67) oriented toward the discovery of meaning(s) in actual conversations. At this staging, subjects are engaged with the *world* of objects by inquiring into the situation at hand. Klyukanov relates communication as conversation to a particular skill—*techné*—of producing meaning as an object of inquiry via mediation by the use of symbols. It is symbolic interaction that necessarily demarcates the distance between subjects and objects filled with potentially meaningful traces, which accumulate over time as living memory. Conversation, therefore, is ongoing, and dialogue is never complete. Communication keeps on flowing along the stream, trying to maintain the rhythm of questions and answers and not to break. Still, the danger of a dialogue breaking up always lurks in “the whitewater rapids [so that] its participants, like weary adventurers, seek solid land” (p. 91), moving into yet another staging, one of “This Earth.”

It is at this staging that participants focus less on each other and more on language, hence becoming consciously aware of the propositions and assertions that comprise a solid ground for symbolic exchange. The word “assertion” in Russian is “utverzdenie,” with its root “tver[z]d” meaning solid, firm, hard. It is at this staging that the analytic philosophy of language rules, asserting that only in accord with its logic can meaning be revealed as freed from the turbulent waters of the previous staging. Klyukanov points out that such an analytic approach is built upon evidence, argumentation, and avoidance of ambiguity by verification. Ordinary language prevails, and metaphysics is banned. Understandably, the author refers to L. Wittgenstein as one of the philosophical sources for his conceptualizations, while also bringing into the conversation G. H. Mead, J. Habermas, M. Bakhtin, and M. Foucault, with the latter’s critique of the current *episteme*. At this staging, communication is not informed by *techné*, but focuses on demonstrable knowledge. In the move from chaos to order, communication is solidified and comprises a hierarchically organized system “standing” on a solid and real foundation: *terra firma* indeed.

Yet the utopian character of such a normative approach is obvious to the author. He demonstrates that the development of conscious discourse between participants paradoxically begins to resemble autistic behavior when, within the search for mutually-shared meanings, subjects and objects can fall victim to their own constructs and keep going in vicious circles within a self-organized system. The way out of this staging—and the ultimate end of communication as construction—is to give up the solid ground under one’s feet that one has managed to build thus far! As Klyukanov makes clear, the end result of this staging is not the cooperative construction of a perfect order based on consensus as its original and

noble aim, but the emergence of an individuated Self who, by excluding oneself from law and order, literally finds oneself *beside* one's Self. This doubling or, vice versa, splitting of personality is a precondition for the further unfolding of communication. Analytic reason gives way to irrational undertaking, the doubling of the subject combines a citizen and a poet, and human experience is of the character of "irrational rationality" (p. 115). Such is the ontological unity of apparent opposites that can form the abovementioned "oneness" of genuine communication.

It is by going through the Fire, as the fourth staging, that communication becomes the means of reconciliation between Self and Other, as well as between "Self and Self" (p. 118). Dark and unexamined corners of oneself are being ignited and illuminated, not unlike alchemical purification. Becoming self-aware demands a creative imagination at the very limits of language, when one is seemingly "re-signing communication, as such" (p. 119), yet continues to correspond with oneself, facing the necessity (or responsibility) toward what Klyukanov dubs "response~ability." Referring to the Cartesian *homunculus* and its critique by M. Merleau-Ponty, the author emphasizes the meaning of resignation as abandoning one's Ego "and opening up one's internal gaze to [the world]; it is no accident that we often close our eyes during a love act or a creative act" (p. 122).

It is at this staging that the moral dimension of experience is at its full force: The subject can get out of the vicious circle of the previous staging by turning this circle into a virtuous one. The epistemic conundrum is avoided because the now-prudent Self becomes capable of *phronēsis*, or the practical wisdom of knowing what is good and right, even amidst ambiguous and problematic experiential situations. Via intrapersonal communication (as deliberation), the subject in effect tells himself "pora," which in Russian means that now it is just the right time to do the right (hence good) thing. In a way, "pora" indicates the very stroke of time (addressed at the start of this review) that makes a communicative experience meaningful: *Chronos* becomes a qualitatively different *kairos* seized in the act of creation, which represents a critical juncture in the spatiotemporal structure of experience, an *event*. Once again, the author highlights the meaning of the word "event" by presenting its Russian equivalent, "sobytie" or so-bytie, literally: *co-being*. It is by being one with the other (even if this other is oneself—or especially when the other is oneself) that communication makes sense and one's Self (with a capital S as the ultimate Jungian archetype of wholeness, integrity, and *oneness*) is (re)created. The act of re-signing, while appearing irrational and hence mad, is simultaneously a creative act: There is method in the madness, even if such "methodology" is above and beyond one's discursive reason. At this staging, for Klyukanov, we are the sites of transcendence, of "proteism" (p. 129) understood as new beginnings when the future is brought into the present or prophesied.

Klyukanov reminds us of the prophetic god Proteus, a shape-shifter, difficult to get hold of. Yet when caught (seized?), he would foretell the future. Likewise for Hermes, the deity of communication, who would tell the truth, sincerely, only if asked the right question, thereby marking (or re-signing; the word *sign* is derived from the Greek *sēmeiō*, meaning "to mark") the way to the future. The presence of the future marks this staging of communication as virtual and full of remembrances that, nonetheless, can duly actualize themselves. The split in the subject can be healed only by bridging the gap "between Self and Self" (p. 143) via leaping into the fire of communication, conquering space, time, and oneself. The

future-becoming-present is *real* (albeit virtual): In Russian, the word “present” translates as *nastoiashchee*, which also means “real”!

The last part of Klyukanov’s book begins with a chapter subtitled “Airy Nothing: Communication as Transformation.” Having exhausted the elements in nature representing its four stagings, communication goes through all four quadrants of the full circle, marking therefore its own “entire universe” (p. 149) filled with meanings as essences. By virtue of their being revealed in experience, the eternal gap between existence and essence is therefore bridged. The meaningful communication universe now covers the whole *oikos*; we are at home in the universe, so to speak—culture and nature coalesce. This conjunction (between culture and nature, self and other, existence and essence, etc.) takes place via a somewhat mystical transformation into one’s own opposite. No wonder that the author presents this staging as sacred and full of “the breath of pleroma” (p. 154).

It is here that communication reveals its holistic (universal) properties and topological nature: The author brings in the metaphor of a Moebius strip as the image of successful communication between the two habitual opposites of the inside and the outside. The split is being healed, indeed. Once again, the Russian equivalent of the verb *to heal* (Klyukanov also uses “to cure”), *istselyatj*, literally means “making whole”! Thus, the effect of genuine communication is always already therapeutic by virtue of returning meaning to its bearer. The meaning endures, even if in its virtual form, and every act of communication is, for Klyukanov, a ritual combining liminality with luminosity so that ultimately, communication ceases to be. What can be left to say except tautologies? The author comments on the dream of reason that reduces everything to the magical formula, not unlike Einstein’s famous equation that unified matter and energy. Dream and reality are equally one, time is eternal, and space unbounded. Under these conditions, the communication universe would be speaking “with one voice of *singularity*” (p. 167; author’s spelling), assigning equal value and significance to everything in such a universal “paradise” and overcoming the private-public split.

The “divine bliss” (p. 168) permeating a communication universe as a result of the unification of opposites would be impossible if not for the cementing presence of love. Each of Klyukanov’s stagings includes love in one guise or another. Incidentally, in Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima-the-Priestess teaches Socrates that Eros or Love is located in the midst between the two opposites of lack and plenty; it is a spirit or daimon that, importantly, can hold two opposites together as one whole, therefore capable of eventually reconciling what dualist ontology posits as two different substances. Even if, during invocation, love is as yet vague and cannot be “named,” its presence is characterized by the implicit subjective desire for kinship with the world of objects. During conversation, love takes the form of *philia*, indicating its future reincarnation in the philosophic discourse as love for wisdom. Is it possible, the author asks, for a particular kind of love, *agápē*, to manifest itself within communication as transformation enveloping the entire universe? The answer is unequivocal, in the opinion of this reviewer. For Charles S. Peirce, *agápē* as specifically *evolutionary* love was the principle guiding development and growth at the cosmic scale toward the ultimate unity between the human and the divine. Klyukanov reminds us that the essence of any “thing” is found in the identity between a subject and a presupposed predicate—that is, in the meaning’s self-reference whenever “a flower flowers” or “communication communicates” (p. 190). Klyukanov’s book communicates! It does express the essence of communication.